United Nations A/54/500

General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 October 1999

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 109
Advancement of women

The new structure and working method of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Executive summary

To remain relevant and at the forefront of strategic policy innovation, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) must be revitalized. The impetus for the revitalization comes from a central role of gender issues on the global agenda, increasing use of new technologies replacing traditional methods of information and knowledge-gathering and management, and the need to be cost-effective. It is essential that the resources of the revitalized INSTRAW should be focused on activities that have significant and measurable effect on the advancement of women.

In view of the need to revitalize INSTRAW to meet the needs of the twenty-first century, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), at its 1999 summer session, adopted resolution 1999/54, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Board of Trustees of INSTRAW, to draw up a new structure and working method for the Institute.

The revitalized INSTRAW will use new information technologies as a means of producing, managing and disseminating gender knowledge and information on critical issues and trends affecting women and men and their roles in development. The essential part of the new Institute — the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System (GAINS) — is an integrated knowledge and information management system, a "one-stop" Web site with such interactive features as a database, networks, gender search capability and on-line discussion forums.

99-31800 (E) 011199

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 1999/54, the Economic and Social Council decided to engage in the revitalization of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Board of Trustees of INSTRAW, to draw up a new structure and working method for the Institute and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

2. The present report, prepared as requested by the resolution, proposes a conceptual framework for the new structure and working method of the Institute, taking into consideration the views of interested States, and builds upon the following parameters indicated in paragraph 2 of the resolution:

(a) The core staff of the Institute should be constituted of a small number of persons, focusing on coordination and servicing;

(b) Training and research should be structured in projects that are to be financed and managed separately;

(c) New technologies should be used for training, research and communications;

(d) Its Web site should be developed to include categorizing and making accessible third party gender research projects, thereby also providing a channel to include the results of those projects in United Nations policy-making for the advancement of women;

(e) An effective network of national and international research institutions should be created.

3. The Institute's mandate has been to undertake research and training programmes contributing to the integration and mobilization of women in development, to raise awareness of women's issues worldwide and to better assist women to meet new challenges and directions. With 16 years of experience related to gender, INSTRAW is strategically positioned to fulfil this role as an autonomous, non-political international research and training institution within the United Nations framework, with direct access to information from all other United Nations institutions, non-governmental organizations, Governments and other research and training institutions. However, its outputs, based on traditional methods of training and research, have neither reached a wide enough client population nor been solid enough to attract the necessary contributions.

4. The Institute's revitalization is based on the original mandate and on the recognition that a great deal of gender-related knowledge and information exists but is fragmented, difficult to access and underutilized by the United Nations and Member States. In recent years, many groups, including non-governmental organizations and national machineries, have been active in generating and disseminating gender-related information and increasingly making it available through their Web sites. Even though gender-specific electronic Web sites, databases, and discussion forums do exist, they are either limited in scope, focusing primarily on the specific work of their own organizations, or they concentrate on issues other than research and training. There is no international institution, to date, using a "one-stop" Web site to bring together, organize, manage, and make available gender-aware knowledge and information from the various sources scattered across the Internet, including sources not accessible through the Internet.

5. With the development of information/communication technologies, and more specifically, the World Wide Web, a great deal of information is becoming available to practically anyone with access to the technology and knowledge to use it. Rapidly falling costs of communication and computing and the growth and accessibility of the World Wide

Web present new opportunities for women to share information and knowledge more widely and cheaply than ever before.

6. Currently, there is no entity in the United Nations system specializing in the use of new information technologies and new approaches to the production and dissemination of gender-aware knowledge and information. To fill this gap, and in line with resolution 1999/54, it is proposed that INSTRAW undertake a new strategic role and working method using primarily new information technologies as a means of producing, managing, disseminating and applying gender-aware knowledge and information on critical issues and trends, in order to promote the equal partnership of women and men in development.

II. The new role and working method

7. Using the new working method, INSTRAW's objectives would be:

(a) To produce, manage and make available to a network of users gender-aware knowledge and information to guide efforts towards engendering national and international development policy and practice;

(b) To gather, organize, and make available gender-aware research findings, training practices and other related knowledge and information, especially from the developing world, to all users;

(c) To engender mainstream research, identify training gaps — as well as good practices — and undertake relevant research and development of new methods of training — e.g., on-line training and interactive distance learning;

(d) To undertake research and training on gender issues;

(e) To enhance gender awareness on critical global issues and trends for the exchange of new ideas, concepts, and methodologies for integrating and advancing existing knowledge on gender issues;

(f) To promote women's empowerment by increasing their participation in the use, production, and management of new information technologies.

8. The new working method of INSTRAW was arrived at through consultations and discussions with the United Nations Secretariat, INSTRAW and Member States.

9. On 24 September 1999, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for INSTRAW held an informal meeting with representatives of regional groups, major donors and other interested States to discuss the possible approaches to the revitalization process in INSTRAW. On the basis of the meeting and after further consultations with the Board of Trustees, the Office of the Controller, the Information Technology Services Division and the Office of Legal Affairs, a note for discussion was prepared and distributed to the Third Committee.

10. The formal meeting of donors and other interested States, as requested in paragraph 3 (c) of the resolution took place on 18 October 1999. The meeting reiterated general support for the approach to developing a new structure and working method set forth in the above-mentioned note and suggested a number of modifications and clarifications. During the meeting, several delegations expressed their readiness to support the revitalized INSTRAW.

Gender Awareness Information and Networking System

11. The centrepiece of the new working method of the revitalized INSTRAW is the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System (GAINS) which will be designed and financed as a project to be implemented in phases, separately from the core funding of the Institute. GAINS is conceptualized as an integrated knowledge and information management system — a "one-stop" Web site with such interactive features as a database, networks, gender search capability, and on-line discussion forums.

12. It is planned that the Web site will be interactive and user-friendly. Given resources and time constraints, it is envisaged that initially only three languages — English, French and Spanish — will be used. As and when resources permit, the three other official languages of the United Nations will be added. The site will be designed with a view to facilitating access to data and knowledge management services by governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, women's associations, and gender focal points in both developing and developed countries. It will provide a variety of features such as continuously updated gender-aware news on publications and research/training events; a "good practices showcase" and eventually a gender-specific search service.

13. It is envisaged that GAINS will offer three core services — research and information networking, and capacity-building.

Research and information

14. GAINS will gather, organize and disseminate, on an on-going basis, gender-aware knowledge and information and provide links to the major databases of gender research and training institutions worldwide. Working through the GAINS knowledge-base, INSTRAW will undertake research to build a state-of-the-art capability on critical gender issues, to identify knowledge gaps, capacity-building needs and good practices, and to provide briefs, reviews and abstracts for policy-making purposes and bibliographical references on special issues. Exploring and using the GAINS resources, INSTRAW will undertake targeted research projects on critical global issues, reconceptualized from a gender perspective and conducted through in-depth studies at the regional and national levels. INSTRAW will also continue to focus on methodological issues related to the mainstreaming of gender in policy development and practice. Given that gender-aware knowledge and information from developing countries is not easily accessible internationally, GAINS will specifically target and make available such information.

Networking

15. INSTRAW will use GAINS to create, coordinate and interconnect networks of key users within and outside the United Nations system. The networks will consist of individuals, organizations and specialized groups that will facilitate information and resource exchange. GAINS will implement joint and/or comparative studies and assess results; establish quality control and peer review procedures; identify experts, scholarships and awards; provide access to mailing lists; post activities etc. It will explore and use the potential of new technologies to stimulate new ideas within the United Nations and outside. At the same time, it will enhance communication, create collaboration and partnerships and encourage dialogue and debate on pressing new challenges for women. Prominent individuals and groups from across disciplines and cultural frameworks will also be engaged in mentoring, panel discussions, small working groups and real-time conferencing on critical global issues.

Capacity-building

16. New information technologies will be used for the development and dissemination of training materials and innovative methods of learning, targeted at a variety of audiences. In addition, specialized knowledge and information and good practices will be repackaged into more user-friendly formats for on-going multipurpose training and learning. Women's non-governmental organizations will be encouraged to establish gender-focused information technology facilities and will be provided with training tools for that purpose.

17. The new structure and working method was proposed by INSTRAW and approved by its Board of Trustees. It recognizes the pivotal role that new information technology will play in the Institute's evolution towards becoming a cutting-edge research and training entity for the twenty-first century. It was further refined through consultations and discussions with the United Nations Secretariat and Member States at a number of meetings.

Research and training projects

18. In addition to the GAINS project, INSTRAW will continue to undertake research and training activities which will be financed, staffed and managed as projects separate from core operations. Those projects are in accordance with the INSTRAW strategic plan and work programme 2000-2003, adopted by the Board of Trustees at the nineteenth session of the Board (May 1999), and will reflect the outcomes and recommendations of the high-level review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.[1] Projects will utilize, where applicable, the GAINS tools and resources. INSTRAW will research and re-conceptualize critical global issues from a gender perspective. The projects will also focus on identifying gender-aware training resources and developing new methods of learning for a variety of Internet audiences, and on new capacity-building methodologies and learning materials.

III. Partnerships for research and training

19. Building effective partnerships will be one of major tasks of INSTRAW's new working method. In paragraph 4 of resolution 1999/54, the Council recommended that the Institute strengthen its collaboration and the coordination of its activities with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations Secretariat), the Commission on the Status of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and establish close collaboration with the United Nations University (UNU) and with other research and training institutes within the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Staff College and the International Labour Organization International Training Centre in Turin, and outside the United Nations as well. It also recommended that INSTRAW continue to participate in the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, in order to coordinate actions and encourage collaboration.

20. A strong partnership with the United Nations system is vital for coordinated integration and dissemination of the gender-related research produced by INSTRAW and for pooling technical, financial and analytical expertise. In particular, the Institute will continue and expand cooperation with other gender-oriented entities of the United Nations system — the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat and UNIFEM.

21. On 21 October 1999, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for INSTRAW, who also chairs the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, convened an inter-agency meeting at which she and the Director of INSTRAW briefed representatives of United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes on the framework for the revitalization of INSTRAW. It was agreed that further steps should be taken to strengthen the cooperation between INSTRAW and the entities of the United Nations system in the framework of the Inter-Agency Committee.

IV. Proposed structure and staffing of the revitalized INSTRAW

22. Since the revitalized INSTRAW will rely mainly on a project-centred approach in financing and programming its activities, it is proposed that the Institute be composed of the following: core operations; and research and training projects, including GAINS as the main project.

23. The core operations will include management and administration, public information, synthesis and analysis of research and training needs, identification of knowledge gaps and future needs, networking and effective partnerships. The conceptualization, design, and organization of each special project, including GAINS and associated fund-raising activities, will be part of the Institute's core operations. The new core structure will comprise three units: Office of the Director and External Relations, Gender Analysis Unit, and Administrative Unit.

24. The core staffing of the Institute will thus not exceed four Professional and Director-level posts (Director of INSTRAW; Chief, Gender Analysis Unit; Gender Analyst; and Administrative Officer), and five General Service posts. The total costs of four Professional and five General Service posts for the 2000-2001 biennium would be approximately $US 1,228,300. In filling its essential positions, INSTRAW will apply a variety of modalities, including non-reimbursable personnel loans from within the United Nations system and related organizations and the Associate Experts Programme. Should the revitalization programme be approved and the necessary funds contributed, consultations between the Director and the Office of Human Resources Management of the Secretariat would have to be held on ways of expediting the recruitment process.

25. The costs of staffing GAINS and other research and training activities will be met by project funds. At the present stage, it is anticipated that functions related to development and maintenance of the GAINS project will be carried out by a GAINS Manager, to be assisted by a Network Officer and two General Service staff. INSTRAW will also engage consultants and short-term personnel for undertaking tasks requiring special expertise unavailable within INSTRAW. Staffing procedures will continue to adhere to the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations.

26. At a later stage INSTRAW would consider re-establishing the Liaison Office in New York to facilitate partnerships and maintain liaison with United Nations entities.

V. Other issues arising from Council resolution 1999/54

27. In paragraph 3 (a) of its resolution 1999/54, the Council urged the Secretary-General to appoint as expeditiously as possible a Director of the Institute, in consultation with the Board of Trustees. In response, on 5 September 1999, after consultations with the Board, the Secretary-General appointed the new Director, Ms. Eleni Stamiris.

28. With regard to the administrative anomalies mentioned in paragraph 3 (b) of resolution 1999/54, INSTRAW will be reimbursed with the appropriate amount in the forthcoming programme budget biennium.

VI. Next steps

29. Should the General Assembly approve the approach to INSTRAW's revitalization contained in the present report, a feasibility study and work plan will have to be completed by December, subject to the availability of funds. In addition, should the 1999 Pledging Conference and other voluntary contributions yield sufficient funds for start-up costs and to cover the biennium's core activities, the Institute would be in a position to commence working on the various components of the revitalization in a phased manner.

30. As requested by the Council, the Director of INSTRAW will submit a report on the implementation of the revitalization measures, including a programme and timetable, to the Council at its substantive session of 2000, through the Board of Trustees at its meeting scheduled to take place in February 2000 in Santo Domingo. It is suggested that the report be considered by the Commission on the Status of Women at its next session, in February/March 2000. The recommendations of the Council on the programme will be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

31. Should the General Assembly agree with the revitalization programme outlined in the present report, it may wish to ensure that INSTRAW is provided with the necessary resources, through voluntary contributions, to carry out the programme and re-orient its activities along the lines outlined in resolution 1999/54. It is estimated that the projected balance of the INSTRAW Fund as of 1 January 2000 would be $638,500 including $119,400 of unpaid pledges.

Notes

[1] See General Assembly resolution 53/120.